

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 BRUSSE 04567 01 OF 02 051820Z
ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 ACDA-07 EB-07 OMB-01 TRSE-00 IO-13 /086 W
-----051922Z 021259 /41

R 051652Z MAY 77
FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9765
INFO AMEMBASSY BERN
AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN
AMEMBASSY DUBLIN
AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE
AMEMBASSY HELSINKI
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG
AMEMBASSY MADRID
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY ROME
AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM
AMEMBASSY VIENNA
USMISSION EC BRUSSELS

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BRUSSELS 04567

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, BE
SUBJECT: THE BELGIAN ELECTONS- A VICTORY FOR CAUTION, CONSENSUS
AND CHARISMA

SUMMARY: APRIL 17 LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS IN BELGIUM CONFIRM
MILD RIGHWARD DRIFT IN EUROPE NORTH OF THE ALPS. MORE
SIGNIFICANT IS THE FAILURE OF THE LEFT TO ATTRACT SUPPORT
FOR RADICAL SOLUTIONS TO SERIOUS SOCIAL/ECONOMIC PROBLEMS
AND THE SUCCESS OF THE BORAD-BASED CENTRIST PROMISE OF
CONSENSUS, NOT CONFRONTATION.
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 BRUSSE 04567 01 OF 02 051820Z

FOREIGN POLICY PLAYED NO ROLE IN THIS ELECTION.
BELIGANS - LIKE PROBABLY MOST WESTERN EUROPEANS - FEEL
THEY CAN LITTLE AFFECT WORLD AFFAIRS AND PREFER TO LET
THOSE WHO CAN WORRY ABOUT THEM.

ONE OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT ELECTIONS IN POSTWAR

BELGIUM CONFIRMS THE NATION'S COMMITMENT TO A NEW FEDERAL STRUCTURE OF THREE REGIONS. MUCH HORSE-TRADING AND CONSTITUTION-AMENDING REMAINS TO BE DONE, BUT THE BASIC ARGUMENT IS OVER. END SUMMARY.

1. ON APRIL 17 SIX MILLION BELGIANS CHOSE A NEW PARLIAMENT IN A SNAP ELECTION UNPLANNED AND LARGELY UNWANTED. THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN WAS EXCRUCIATINGLY DULL. THE RESULTS VIRTUALLY INSURED THAT BELGIUM WILL BE LED BY THE SAME PRIME MINISTER AS BEFORE HEADING A GOVERNMENT DOMINATED BY THE SAME PARTY AS BEFORE. GIVEN ALL THIS, ANALYSIS OF THE APRIL 17 VOTING MAKES CLEAR THAT THIS WAS ONE OF THE MORE SIGNIFICANT ELECTIONS IN POSTWAR BELGIUM. VIEWED ON A WIDER CANVAS, THE ATTITUDES MANIFESTED IN THE BELGIAN LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS PROVIDE A USEFUL INDICATOR OF THE POLITICAL MOOD PREVAILING IN WESTERN EUROPE IN SPRING, 1977.

2. TO THE EXTENT THAT BELGIANS REFLECT THE JUDGMENTS OF THE INHABITANTS OF NON-COMMUNIST EUROPE (AND THEY ARE MORE REPRESENTATIVE THAN MOST), TODAY'S WESTERN EUROPEAN IS, AS A POLITICAL BEING, A SEEKER AFTER CONSENSUS RATHER THAN CONFRONTATION, ONE WHO HEARKENS TO LEADERS RATHER THAN TO IDEAS, WHO PREFERS THE PREDICTABLE KNOWN TO SPECULATIVE INNOVATION. ALTHOUGH BELGIUM IS ACKNOWLEDGED TO HAVE LOTS OF PROBLEMS DEMANDING URGENT ATTENTION, BELGIAN VOTERS SHOWED THEMSELVES ON ELECTION DAY TO BE UNINSPIRED AND UNINSPIRING. THEY BOUGHT NO MAGIC NOSTRUMS. THEY CAST THEIR VOTES FOR

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 BRUSSE 04567 01 OF 02 051820Z

LEADERS WHO GAVE PROMISE OF PULLING THINGS TOGETHER AND FINDING HARMONIOUS SOLUTIONS TO SHARED PROBLEMS. THE ONLY CLEAR MANDATE GIVEN - AND A SIGNIFICANT ONE - WAS TO PRIME MINISTER LEO TINDEMANS, A REASSURING, SOFT-SELL CENTRIST POLITICIAN WHOSE PARTICULAR GENIUS HAS BEEN TO CONCENTRATE, WITH SUCCESS, ON GETTING THROUGH TOMORROW.

3. THE APRIL 17 RESULTS CONTINUED AND CONFIRMED THE RECENT MODERATE RIGHTWARD DRIFT IN WESTERN EUROPE NORTH OF THE ALPS. MORE MEANINGFUL WAS A STRENGTHENING OF THE DEMOCRATIC MAJORITY IN THE POLITICAL MIDDLE AGAINST EXTREMISTS ON EITHER SIDE. THE BIG LOSERS IN BELGIUM WERE THE MILITANT LEFT IN WALLONIA AND THE LIBERAL (I. E., CONSERVATIVE) PARTY IN FLANDERS, WHICH MADE THE MISTAKE OF ASSUMING A COMBATIVE ANTI-LABOR STANCE.

4. THE SOCIALIST PARTY, THE TRADITIONAL HOME OF BELGIUM'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT, HELD ONTO ITS ONE-QUARTER OF THE ELECTORATE. BUT THIS RELATIVE SUCCESS DID NOT

OBSURE THE GROSS FAILURE OF PSB'S RADICAL WING TO RALLY WORKING-CLASS BELGIUM TO THE STANDARD OF IDEOLOGICAL STRUGGLE AND A CRUSADE FOR FUNDAMENTAL RE-STRUCTURING OF THE COUNTRY'S SOCIAL/ECONOMIC ORDER. THE LITTLE BELGIAN COMMUNIST PARTY, TRYING UNCONVINCINGLY TO IMITATE MARCHAIS AND CO., MADE ITS WORST SHOWING IN TWENTY YEARS. THE REGIONAL PARTY, REASSEMBLEMENT WALLON, LOOKING FOR SALVATION IN LEFTIST RADICALISM, NEARLY DESTROYED ITSELF.

CONFIDENTIAL

NNN

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 BRUSSE 04567 02 OF 02 051855Z

ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 ACDA-07 EB-07 OMB-01 TRSE-00 IO-13 /086 W

-----051931Z 021884 /41

R 051652Z MAY 77

FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9766

INFO AMEMBASSY BERN

AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY HELSINKI

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY MADRID

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM

AMEMBASSY VIENNA

USMISSION EC BRUSSELS

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BRUSSELS 04567

5. THE MOST IMPRESSIVE PERFORMANCE WAS THAT OF TINDEMANS' CHRISTIAN PARTY, WHICH SPREADS ITS ARMS AS WIDE AS ROOSEVELT'S NEW DEAL. THE CVP/PSC BOOSTED ITS SHARE OF THE POPULAR VOTE FROM 32 PERCENT IN 1974 TO 36 PERCENT. THIRTY-EIGHT OF THE PARTY'S 80 DEPUTIES IN THE NEW PARLIAMENT REPRESENT ORGANIZED LABOR. FORTY-TWO COME OUT OF THE FARMERS' ORGANIZATION AND THE MIDDLE CLASS

MOVEMENT OR ARE INDEPENDENTS. THE CHRISTIAN PARTY THUS
CONSTITUTES AN ALMOST EXACT CROSS-SECTION OF BELGIAN
SOCIETY, MINUS EXTREMISTS AT EITHER END. WELL -MANAGED
BY MODERN PROFESSIONALS LIKE CVP PRESIDENT WILFRIED MARTENS,
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 BRUSSE 04567 02 OF 02 051855Z

IT IS ASSURED OF A PIVOTAL ROLE IN BELGIAN POLITICS FOR
LONG TO COME.

6. THE HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE 1977 ELECTION
IS THAT FINIS SEEMS SURELY TO HAVE BEEN WRITTEN TO
BELGIUM'S LONG AND AGONIZING EFFORT TO COME TO TERMS
POLITICALLY WITH THE FACT OF THE COUNTRY'S DIVISION
INTO TWO CULTURAL/LINGUISTIC COMMUNITIES. THE
CONSTITUTION HAS NOT BEEN RE-WRITTEN. SOME BITTER
SKIRMISHES REMAIN TO BE FOUGHT OVER THE EXACT NATURE
OF THE FEDERATED STATE NOW BEING BORN. BUT THE APRIL
ELECTION SHOWED, IN THE FOLLOWING WAYS, THAT THE BASIC
ARGUMENT IS OVER:

A. BELGIANS, BY CASTING THEIR VOTES IN A REGIONAL,
NOT AN IDEOLOGICAL MODE, SHOWED THAT THE COUNTRY ALREADY
IS DIVIDED INTO THREE DISTINCT REGIONS, EACH NOW WITH A
DIFFERENT POLITICAL PROFILE.

B. BY SOLIDLY CONFIRMING THEIR FRANCOPHONE
DEMOCRATIC FRONT AS THE DOMINANT PARTY IN BRUSSELS,
THE CAPITAL'S FRENCH-SPEAKING CITIZENS (AN OVERWHELMING
MAJORITY) HAVE MADE IT INDISPUTABLE THAT BRUSSELS IS
A THIRD REGION IN BELGIUM, DISTINCT FROM BOTH FLANDERS
AND WALLONIA.

C. AT THE SAME TIME RETURNS FROM
THE CAPITAL'S SUBURBS SHOWED THAT THE FRANCOPHONE "COLONIZATION"
OF NEARBY FLANDERS HAS BEEN STEMMED AND THE FRANCOPHONE
DREAM OF A GREATER BRUSSELS IN THE HEART OF FLEMISH
BRABANT IS ILLUSORY.

D. THE THREE TRADITIONAL POLITICAL PARTIES HAVE
BEGUN TO WIN BACK THE VOTERS THEY LOST IN THE LAST
GENERATION TO THE ONE-ISSUE LINGUISTIC PARTIES IN
FLANDERS AND WALLONIA, WHICH ARE BECOMING THE VICTIMS
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 BRUSSE 04567 02 OF 02 051855Z

OF THEIR SUCCESS.

3. BUT THE TRADITIONAL PARTIES HAVE PAID A PRICE
IN THE FORM OF THEIR EFFECTIVE DIVISION INTO AUTONOMOUS
FLEMISH AND FRANCOPHONE SECTIONS, EACH DISTINCT IN
LEADERSHIP, POLICY ORIENTATION AND TYPE OF POLITICAL
FOLLOWING. THEY ARE BOUND TO MOVE YET FURTHER APART.

7. COMMENT: BELGIUM, A SMALL COUNTRY, OFFERS ONLY A
SAMPLER OF WESTERN EUROPEAN OPINION, BUT THE APRIL BALLOTING
RECORDED SOME JUDGMENTS WHICH ARE WORTH NOTING IN
ANY ASSAY OF THE CURRENT STATE OF MIND IN EUROPE.

THESE ARE:

INFLATION, UNEMPLOYMENT AND GENERAL ECONOMIC
MALAISE (WHICH BELGIUM SHARES WITH MOST OF EUROPE)
PROVED TO BE NO WINDFALL FOR THE REFORMIST LEFT. ON
THE CONTRARY, THE PREVAILING BELGIAN REACTION IS
CLEARLY TO SEEK TO DRAW TOGETHER AND WORK THROUGH
THE BAD PATCH WITH LEAST POSSIBLE UPSET.

FOREIGN POLICY PLAYED NO ROLE WHATEVER IN THIS
ELECTION. THE BELGIAN VOTER EITHER LIKES THE WORLD AS
HE VIEWS IT OR FIGURES HE CAN'T DO MUCH ABOUT IT ANYHOW.

PERSONALITIES RATHER THAN IDEAS NOW DOMINATE
BELGIAN POLITICS. THE HIGH FINISHERS IN THE PREFERENCE-VOTE
SWEEPSTAKES WERE POLITICIANS WITH MUCH PUBLIC EXPOSURE
AND/OR PERSONALITIES WHICH PROJECT FORCEFULLY THROUGH
THE INFORMATION MEDIA.

THE EVIDENCES OF A LITTLE EUROPE MENTALITY ARE
NOT HARD TO DISCOVER IN BELGIUM THIS SPRING: CAUTION,
CONSENSUS, DISINTEREST IN WORLD AFFAIRS, CONCENTRATION
ON THE HERE AND NOW - AND NEVER MIND THE IMPOSSIBLE
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 BRUSSE 04567 02 OF 02 051855Z

DREAMS.
RENNER

CONFIDENTIAL

NNN

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: ELECTION RESULTS, PUBLIC OPINION POLLS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 05-May-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977BRUSSE04567
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770158-0474
Format: TEL
From: BRUSSELS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770591/aaaadaxo.tel
Line Count: 266
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 6386179a-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 23-Nov-2004 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2635392
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: THE BELGIAN ELECTONS- A VICTORY FOR CAUTION, CONSENSUS AND CHARISMA SUMMARY: APRIL 17 LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS IN BELGIUM
TAGS: PINT, BE
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/6386179a-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009